



## PSA-010-Simpson Bay Lagoon Development-St. Maarten

How do we save coral reefs?

Vic Ferguson

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### Nature Foundation concerned about marina plans for lagoon

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SIMPSON BAY--Nature Foundation has expressed via official letter to government its concern about the possible building of marinas and possible other development in one of the last remaining mangrove stands in Simpson Bay Lagoon.

The foundation has expressed its concern based on discussions about areas that were previously zoned as green areas in the Zoning Plan for St. Maarten are now being labelled as areas where development is slated to take place.

Of particular concern is that these areas are where the Nature Foundation recently conducted a mangrove reforestation program where some 8,000 juvenile mangroves were planted, a significant and costly undertaking for a conservation management organization and one that has gained wide scale recognition throughout the region.

The foundation said in a press statement that it is with significant concern that it is following the developments regarding areas where some of the last remaining relatively healthy mangrove strands are left in the Simpson Bay Lagoon. The area from the Cole Bay side of the Simpson Bay Causeway to Princess Port de Plaisance Marina are some of the last relatively healthy areas of not only mangrove strands, but also of sea grass beds that support habitat for conch, lobster, and numerous fish species. Based on a 2012 Nature Foundation Report, that area is responsible for the maintaining of acceptable water quality levels in other areas of the lagoon.

Also based on the 2012 study, if that section would be developed the entire eastern section of the Simpson Bay Lagoon from the Causeway to Cole Bay would experience significant environmental collapse with no living, viable ecosystems in place to support life. A significant drop in water quality will also be experienced, turning that section into what is scientifically termed a "dead zone."

Additionally, the mangrove sections, based on the Nature Foundation report on the effects of climate change, will play an important role in the rise of seawater levels. If those areas are removed the effects of climate change, including the flooding of some Cole Bay areas, will be realized as mangroves, which fulfil a significant coastal protection function, are essential in protecting communities from the effects of climate change.

Many conservation organizations and residents have expressed hope that the section in question will be preserved in its current state considering that it, together with areas such as Little Key and Mullet Pond currently form the ecological backbone of the Simpson Bay Lagoon.

"There is no question that the development of the area and the destruction of important natural habitat that is associated with that will have dire consequences for the Simpson Bay Lagoon and St. Maarten in general. The



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conclusions that are outlined in this letter are based on and supported by scientific studies conducted of the area, further highlighting the negative effects that can occur based on scientific fact," the foundation said.

The Nature Foundation urges all stakeholders involved to review the process and come to the mutual conclusion that developing the area will cause ecological collapse in one or multiple sections of the lagoon and does not fit within the context of sustainable development, a development where the economy of St. Maarten, the St. Maarten society including the communities of Cole Bay and Simpson Bay, and the environment in the Simpson Bay Lagoon is sufficiently managed and supported for future sustainable growth.

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